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ABSTRACT

In 1969, the Economic Development Council and the Division of High Schools of the New York City Board of Education formed a partnership to deal with problems in inner city schools. The result of that partnership was the High School Self-Renewal Program. The program, first implemented in two inner city high schools, was designed in such a way that people involved in each school would independently determine what their own problems were, which of these were most critical, and what might be done to solve these problems. Participation of school staff, students, and parents was sought. In this report the history of the Renewal program and its increasing implementation in New York City high schools are described. Projects and products developed to solve particular problems defined by the various schools and the goals of these projects are mentioned. Some views of administrators, staff members, and a student are expressed. Wide involvement, communication, cooperation, and positive results are general qualities of the Renewal program that these persons describe as having taken place in their schools. (Author/GC)

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A BRIEF HISTORY OF SCHOOL SELF-RENEWAL IN NEW YORK CITY

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In an attempt to solve the urgent problems facing schools during the 1960s and early 1970s, Federal, state and local governments spent billions of dollars on education, developing and installing many educational innovations in the nation's schools. While there were some positive results, many expectations and hopes were not realized, nor were the problems of the schools solved. Disadvantaged children did not seem to be learning much better in the early 1970s than they had in the early 1960s. The innovations developed outside the school did not seem to meet the needs of the schools themselves.

By 1974, a report from the National Institute of Education (NIE) acknowledged that no matter how good educational innovations and products were, "such products will spread slowly and see little effective use until schools and districts develop their own capacity to engage in an active search for solutions to their own problems, to adapt solutions to their particular situations, and equally important, to adapt themselves as organizations to the requirements of the selected solutions."

In 1969, five years before this NIE finding surfaced, an experiment was undertaken in two inner-city high schools in New York City with staff and funds from the Economic Development Council (EDC) and the Board of Education (BOE) to test a different approach to the critical problems of education. The EDC, a non-profit organization with a membership of more than 200 corporations, was formed to help bring the capacities of the business community to assist the public sector in the solution of urban problems, such as education, the delivery of social and other human services and the administration of justice.

When EDC's Educational Subcommittee recommended that EDC establish partnerships with two inner-city high schools, they acknowledged the overwhelming problem of achieving any constructive consequences. But the committee also stated that EDC's "stake in the educational process was so vital that to turn our backs to the problem would be to violate the very principle on which the council was founded. We are, after all," the committee continued, "deeply committed to the economic development of New York City, and this obviously cannot take place so long as successive cohorts of young people are entering or trying to enter the labor force not only ill prepared but poorly motivated to assume responsible roles in the world of work."

The partnership that EDC formed with the Division of High Schools (DOHS) of the Board of Education resulted in the current High School Self-Renewal Program. It differed from other educational efforts in that people involved in each school independently determined what their own

problems were, which were most critical and what they might do to solve these problems. In essence, they formulated their own goals and objectives, set their own priorities and developed their own plans and projects. Since school staff, students and parents were most familiar with their problems, they were judged best qualified to pinpoint them and seek solutions, given the opportunity and an effective procedure. This approach proved to be a very efficient use of human resources. Moreover, the multi-level participation involved in Renewal produced an additional benefit—an effective morale boost among the various constituencies in the school community as they found they could be effective in solving problems. The partnership program was extended to two additional inner-city schools in 1970 and continued until 1974. It involved school staff, students and parents as well as representatives from the larger community and business who collaborated in diagnosing the problems of each school, in deciding which problems were most critical and in exploring what they might do to solve them. With the assistance of EDC staff, educational consultants and research and development funds, the schools re[illegible]ped, implemented [illegible] projects designed [illegible]s. Progress in problem s[illegible]e effectively meeting stude[illegible] needs was evident in all four schools.

Supported by funds and staff from EDC as well as staff provided by the Board of Education, the partnership experiment has gone through three phases. During Phase I, member companies of EDC loaned full-time personnel to work in each of the four high schools under the direction of an EDC executive trained in the behavioral and management sciences and experienced in both education and in industry. Four corporate executives served as consultants to the "on loan" personnel in each of the four schools and functioned as a group in assessing the progress of the experiment and in advising EDC and its Board of Directors on potential future direction of the program.

During Phase II, which started in September, 1975, EDC and the Division of High Schools introduced the "Self-Renewal" strategy and expanded participation to four more schools. The Corporate "on loan" personnel had been phased out of the original schools the previous spring. The eight participating principals selected one of their teachers to serve as Renewal coordinator in each school. During this phase, EDC provided on-site consulting assistance in Organizational Development to each school principal, coordinator and planning committee, and off-site professional development workshops on Renewal

concepts and methodology.

Eight additional schools became a part of the Renewal Program during Phase III in the spring of 1976, and eight more joined the Program in the fall of 1976, although the DOHS could no longer provide any released time or funding. Unlike other programs which have collapsed with the elimination of funding, the Renewal Program (at the request of the BOE and with the support of its Chancellor, the DOHS and Borough Superintendents) is expected to expand. Future plans include the addition of all of the 100 high schools in New York City that elect to become a part of the Renewal Program. The established participation of schools during this Phase is an indication of the feasibility of Renewal without funds or released-time allocations. In Phase III, much greater emphasis is being placed on advance preparation of school staffs that elect to undertake Renewal and on the refinement of the process to enable the schools to adapt and institutionalize the process as efficiently and rapidly as possible as an ongoing program. Periodic off-site institutes, colloquia and workshops with regular on-site consultation by an EDC staff consultant assigned to the school are the primary vehicles for introducing the High School Self-Renewal Program in Phase III.

The New York City high schools which have participated in the Renewal Program to date are: Louis D. Brandeis, James Monroe, Bushwick, George Washington, Eastern District, Franklin K. Lane, Julia Richman, Theodore Roosevelt, Bay Ridge, William Cullen Bryant, Benjamin Franklin, Charles Evans Hughes, Andrew Jackson, Thomas Jefferson, Morris, Walton, Grover Cleveland, Curtis, John Jay, Martin Luther King, Jr., James Madison, Manhattan Vocational Technical, Satellite Academy and Sheepshead Bay.

The Renewal schools have developed many projects and products to solve critical problems which they identified and ranked as their highest priorities. Among them were projects in basic remediation, career education, curriculum development in various departments, a computerized attendance/cutting system, new learning centers or schools-within-schools and peer guidance programs. Among the goals of these projects were improvement of basic academic skills, adequate preparation for students entering the labor force after graduation, reduction in absences, increased student interest and motivation and the development of a sense of belonging among students.

SOME VIEWS OF RENEWAL

"Renewal means to share the feeling with a substantial number of faculty members that positive change is possible without massive infusions of money, without curriculum bulletins from the State Department of Education and without directives from the central office or, for that matter, from the principal or department chairman. By establishing a process of self-improvement, the school can enlist the abilities of large numbers of people—almost insuring the success of the program. It's not magic—it's hard work and faith in the school's staff and students."

Irving Fleichner
Principal
Monroe High School

"Good management can be boiled down to *generating the best ideas* and plans and making certain that they are *followed up* effectively.

"Since the *heart of Renewal* is participative decision making, the involvement of many staff members generates *many more ideas*, and these are of *greater practicability* because they come from the people who are closest to the many different operations in the organization.

"In addition, these people carry out the plans *(follow-up)* with greater "know-how" and enthusiasm because they have "ownership" of them.

"Thus, if good staff morale means that many people in the school are united for a common purpose, this is the approach to build that quality of spirit."

Murray Cohn
Principal
Brandeis High School

"We entered the Renewal project with several fundamental beliefs including:

- that a school was a business institution dealing in the delivery of services (instructional, vocational, guidance, etc.) to students;
- that systematic problem solving is a technique vital to a healthy dynamic organization;
- that a school can use its own resources in new, effectives modes as it develops long-range goals and priorities it needs.

"Systematic problem solving or Renewal has helped us more effectively involve a great number of faculty members in goal setting, planning and the decision-making process. It has expanded the spirit of ownership in school projects and more effectively prioritized projects and time usage demands.

"Training in problem-solving techniques on the cabinet level has been translated into the generation of task forces on several projects, training in these techniques on a department-wide basis, as well as the training of some student leaders in these techniques.

"The Renewal focus is helping us not only meet our current demands more effectively but is assisting us in actively planning our programs for our decade."

Joan M. Leonard
Principal
Bay Ridge High School

"I have always been concerned with the problem of teacher participation in the planning and decision-making process within the school. The Renewal effort has been instrumental in facilitating considerable input in this area. Moreover, it has helped to expose a good portion of our staff to many innovative projects currently being undertaken in other schools. Concurrently, sources outside the education profession have been constructively tapped. These experiences have assisted our efforts immeasurably."

Steve Mayer
Chairman, Renewal Committee
Charles Evans Hughes High School

"The Renewal committee has provided an opportunity to expand interest and committment to Charles Evans Hughes High School.

"The Renewal process of problem solving and decision making as experienced in the Renewal committee has become an invaluable tool which is applicable to situations in the department and the classroom."

Sybil Evans
Chairperson, Social Studies
Charles Evans Hughes High School

"The Renewal committee at Hughes has provided an important opportunity for interested teachers and students to affect the programs and policies of the school. It has allowed for constructive interchange of ideas among its participants, and has led to an investigation of some of the root problems facing urban high schools today."

Bruce Markens
Social Studies Teacher
Charles Evans Hughes High School

"The Renewal process works because, once started, it affords the opportunity for the use of a vehicle for effective improvement. Also, the process encourages the positive involvement of all: faculty, administrators and students. Faculty and students have the opportunity to express and to share feelings and ideas on the needs of the school.

"Through this involvement many ideas and programs are implemented simultaneously. I am pleased to participate in the Renewal process."

Adele Scheller
Counselor
Morris High School

"Renewal, to me, is a new hope for the schools in New York City, especially for Walton High School. Walton has many problems which we are trying to solve through the Renewal program. With Renewal, we were able to get out a survey to all the students asking them what *they* felt were the things that needed improvement in school. Now we are setting up committees of interested students to try and solve some of these problems. For the first time in a long time, there is the possibility of many more students being directly involved and participating in what goes on in our school."

Dona Smith
Sophomore President
Walton High School

"The concept of Self-Renewal is a most valuable one. The High School Division is very grateful to the Economic Development Council for its work over the past years with our schools in stimulating interest in this approach, providing staff training in relevant procedures and techniques, and in offering constructive expertise in helping schools identify and work at managerial problems.

"The Self-Renewal concept calls upon us to take a look at what we do. In the best sense of problem solving, it directs administrators and staff to the definition of a problem area, an analysis of components of this need situation, a survey of pertinent data from involved parties, the formulation of an attack on the difficulties, and involvement of all concerned in appropriate corrective measures.

"What I find particularly valuable, especially in this time of troubles, is that Self-Renewal has no provision for self-pity. It moves in on problems and seeks to establish a constructive *modus operandi* for dealing with them. The process of problem identification, broad involvement, and constructive action is even more significant than particular solutions found.

"The program of Self-Renewal has exemplified further how different groups of the community — the schools and business can work together effectively in the interest of children.

"I commend this manual to our staffs and the schools for the vision and strength it offers us."

Samuel Polatnick
Executive Director
Board of Education of the City of New York